

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000127

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, DRL/CRA

PLEASE ALSO PASS TOPEC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01-23-14

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: UNICEF reports that the Tamil Tigers forcibly recruited over 700 children in 2003

Refs: (A) 03 Colombo 2110

- (B) 03 Colombo 2094 (All Notal)

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: UNICEF's Sri Lanka Office has issued a report stating that the Tamil Tigers forcibly recruited over 700 children in 2003. With the Tigers showing little sign of stopping forcible recruitment, UNICEF has again warned that it may have to suspend the child transit center program it runs with LTTE cooperation. A pro-LTTE Tamil politician downplayed UNICEF's findings. In continuing the odious practice, the Tigers appear to have calculated that the need for new recruits outweighs the international opprobrium they are earning. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) UNICEF REPORT: On January 22, UNICEF issued a status report on its "Action Plan for Children Affected by War" in Sri Lanka. (The plan was developed in cooperation with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, "LTTE," organization in 2003.) In the report, UNICEF asserts that the Tigers forcibly recruited 709 children in 2003. (Children are defined as those under 18.) At the same time, in 2003, over 200 children were either released by the Tigers through a recently-established UNICEF transit center located in the northern town of Kilinochchi, or were reported to have escaped from the LTTE. UNICEF believes that approximately 1,300 children currently are being held by the LTTE. The report also states that since the signing of the GSL-LTTE ceasefire agreement in February 2002, 1,722 children had been recruited by the LTTE, and of that number, 1,252 had been subjected to military training. Some of the children have also apparently been funneled into the LTTE's political cadre wing. The average age of children recruited by the Tigers was fifteen, according to UNICEF, with the youngest case of recruitment in 2003 reported to be of a ten year old girl.

3. (C) WARNING THE LTTE: In discussing the report, Ted Chaiban, the head representative of UNICEF in Sri Lanka, said in a press briefing that "the LTTE must cease all recruitment of children and they must release all child soldiers immediately." In previous discussions with Mission personnel, including a meeting last week with Staffdel Gilley/McCormick, Chaiban has expressed great concern about the continuing reports of child recruitment by the Tigers. He indicated, for example, that if the Tigers did not stop forcible recruitment UNICEF would have to shut down its transit center in Kilinochchi and would not open a transit center in Batticaloa in the east that is slated to begin operations soon. (UNICEF's transit center program, budgeted at 14.2 million USD, provides a formal mechanism for the release and reintegration of child soldiers back to their families and into society.) Chaiban has also told the Tigers directly that the transit center program will be stopped if the Tigers do not end child recruitment. (Note: UNICEF has been involved in trying to end forcible recruitment of children in Sri Lanka for years. In 1998, UN Special Representative on Children in Armed Conflict Olara Otunnu brokered an agreement with the Tigers in which the group vowed to stop the recruitment of children. Since that time, the Tigers have assured UNICEF and other visitors that they have stopped underage recruitment. Based on these LTTE assertions, UNICEF opened its first transit center in Kilinochchi in October 2003.)

4. (C) TAMIL POLITICIAN DEFENDS TIGERS: When asked about the UNICEF report by Pol FSN, Joseph Pararajasingham, a MP for the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) from Batticaloa, downplayed its importance. He asserted that much of the claimed forcible recruitment had happened in the past and he indicated that rogue Tiger commanders were probably to blame. The Tigers were not currently engaging in the

practice, he averred, and he promised that the group was intent on cooperating with UNICEF. Queried about the report of a ten year old girl being recruited, he said the LTTE had requested her birth certificate from UNICEF. UNICEF, however, had not provided it to the Tigers as of yet. Without this information, the Tigers could not fully investigate the girl's situation, Pararajasingham insinuated.

15. (C) COMMENT: The Tigers have been busy in a game of telling UNICEF and others that it wants to end the practice of forcible recruitment. The LTTE has even cooperated to some extent with UNICEF's programs. At the same time, however, the Tigers continue to forcibly recruit children. In continuing the odious practice, the Tigers appear to believe that the need for new recruits outweighs the international opprobrium they are earning. This apparent calculation lends additional credence to the widely held assessment that the Tigers continue to use the ongoing ceasefire to mobilize and restock their military/political apparatus to the full extent possible. Regarding another claim that is often made, we do not believe that some Tiger cadre, operating without orders from the center, are doing the forcible recruitment of their own volition. The LTTE is much too centralized an organization for that to be the case.
END COMMENT.

16. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD